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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
16 April 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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HIGHLIGHTS

Small-scale terrorism, harassment, and sabotage continue to dominate Communist activity in South Vietnam. The level of battalion-strength government operations against the Viet Cong remains unchanged. On the political front, the Communists are apparently getting set for a major propaganda offensive at the Bundung Conference anniversary celebration in Djakarta.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Further details on the large-scale air attack on Viet Cong War Zone C have become available, but no firm assessment of results is as yet possible (Paras. 1-3). Unconfirmed press reports state that 71 Viet Cong have been killed in two government-initiated heliborne operations in Binh Dinh and An Xuyen provinces, respectively (Para. 5). A nine-day ARVN search-and-destroy operation in Binh Dinh Province has been terminated with generally favorable results (Para. 7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
There are still some signs of friction, primarily between commander in chief General Minh and Premier Quat, over the issue of disciplining junior officers involved in last week's naval mutiny (Paras. 1 and 2).

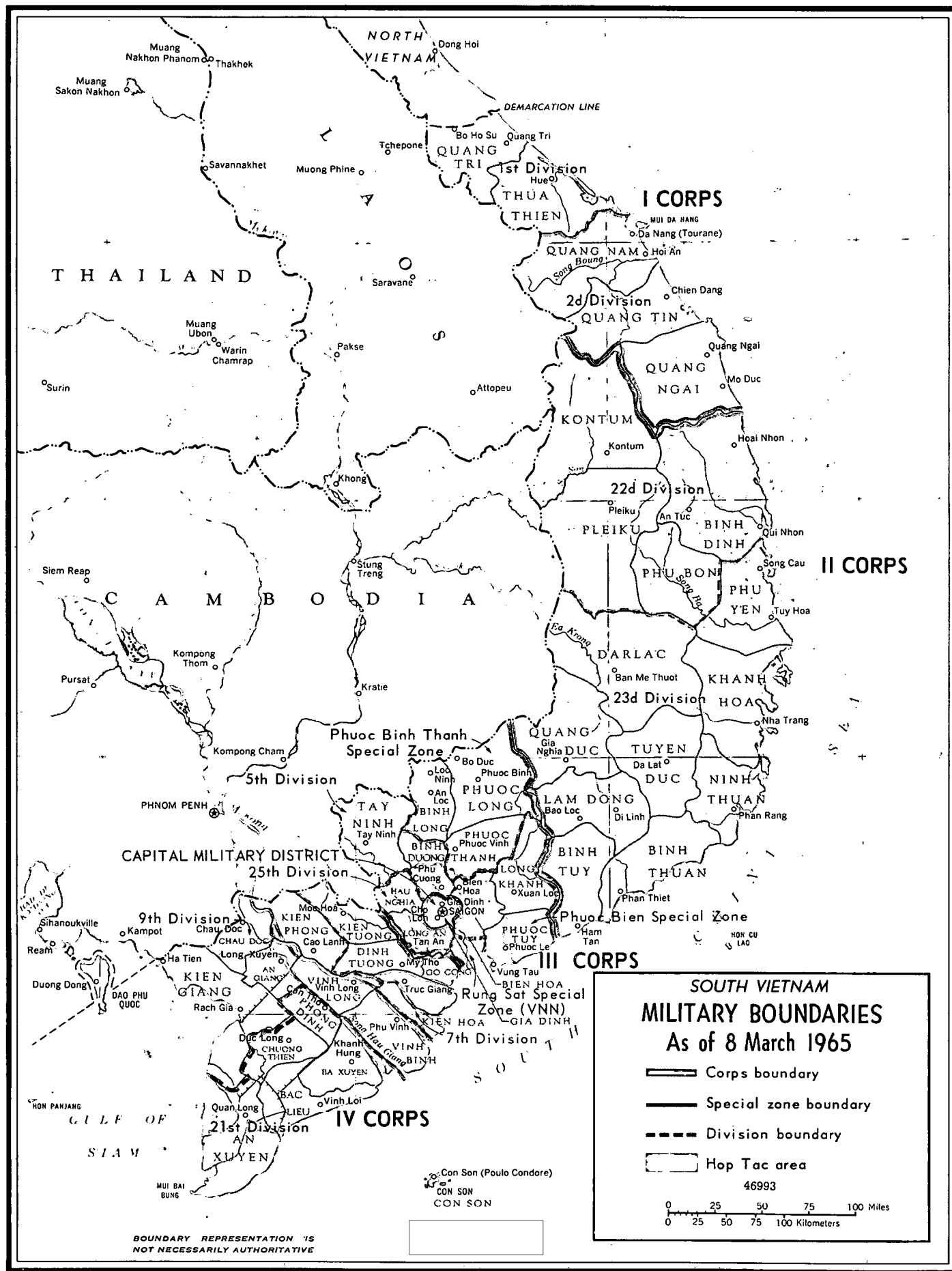
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
All five bridges attacked by US air strikes on 16 April were either destroyed or rendered unusable. All the aircraft involved returned safely (Paras. 1 and 2).

V. Communist Political Developments: Asian Communist political leaders have now arrived in Djakarta for celebration of the Bandung Conference anniversary after a two-day strategy session in Communist China (Paras. 1 and 2). Propaganda statements made in connection with the coming celebration foreshadow a major Communist effort to use the gathering as a forum for attacks on US policy (Paras. 3, 4, and 5). The Chinese continue their public demands for a US withdrawal and are maintaining their hard propaganda line concerning possible negotiations (Paras. 6 and 7). Peiping is, however, seeking to avoid giving an impression of complete intransigence by responding to the nonaligned nations' appeal and by attempting to explain their rebuff to U Thant (Paras. 8, 9, and 10). A speech by the DRV vice minister of defense indicates that Hanoi is concentrating on efforts to strengthen the home front in response to US attacks (Para. 11). A report that North Vietnamese party secretary Le Duan has gone to Moscow remains unconfirmed (Para. 12).

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Official reporting from Saigon provides the following additional details on yesterday's bombing of War Zone C in Tay Ninh Province. An estimated 862 tons of bombs were expended in the strike area. The ordnance loads consisted of heavy bombs (primarily 750-lb. and 500-lb. GP) fused to penetrate underground facilities. Targets included arms work shops; weapons, ammunition, food, clothing, and other supply depots; training centers; rest and regrouping centers; and district and provincial headquarters.

2. Visibility over the target declined steadily throughout the day as smoke from the aerial bombardment covered the area. Six secondary explosions were reported, one of which sent a white billowing cloud rising up to 3,000 feet. Another secondary explosion uncovered entrances to underground installations. Forward Air Control (FAC) reported 15 structures destroyed. Two vehicles were strafed and destroyed by US F-100s. Late in the day, bomb blasts ripped tree cover off a large cluster of hidden wooden structures, estimated from 30 to 100 in number. The degree of damage to these structures could not be discerned due to poor visibility. Ground fire was light and all aircraft were safely recovered.

3. At dawn today, three battalions of ARVN troops were airlifted into the strike zone; initial reports indicate no contact with the Viet Cong.

4. The two-day ARVN search-and-destroy operation against the 804th Viet Cong main force battalion southeast of Quang Tri City in Quang Tri Province was terminated on 14 April. Final results show friendly casualties somewhat less than previously reported, with eight killed and 37 wounded. Nine weapons were lost and two armored personnel carriers damaged. Five Viet Cong were confirmed killed, and a reported 40 dead were carried away.

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5. The press reports that an estimated 71 Viet Cong were killed in two government-initiated helicopter operations in South Vietnam yesterday. In Binh Dinh Province, 280 miles northeast of Saigon, 20 guerrillas were reportedly killed by air attacks and 31 by ground action. ARVN units sustained casualties of one killed and 31 wounded. In An Xuyen Province, in southernmost South Vietnam, US helicopter fire reportedly killed 20 Viet Cong. Government losses in this action were unknown.

6. MACV's military report for 14 April shows 60 Viet Cong - initiated incidents, five of which occurred during the reporting period. Small-scale terrorism, harassment, and sabotage continued to dominate Communist activity.

7. The level of government-initiated ground operations of battalion strength or larger remained unchanged. Ten operations were initiated and ten terminated, leaving 20 operations continuing on 14 April. A large-scale ARVN operation initiated in Binh Dinh Province on 6 April to locate and destroy the 50th main force Viet Cong battalion and one local force Viet Cong company was terminated with generally favorable results on 14 April. Guerrilla losses were placed at 27 killed, four captured, 41 suspects detained. Seven weapons were captured. Government forces suffered two killed and 11 wounded.

8. Company-size or smaller operations conducted on 14 April increased to 2,375. Only six contacts were made with the Viet Cong, none of which produced significant results.

9. VNAF/USAF interdiction and logistics sorties reflected a slight increase during the reporting period. Results from combat air operations conducted throughout the four corps areas on 14 April list 22 Viet Cong killed and 105 structures destroyed.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Some friction in the aftermath of last week's naval mutiny is still apparent in Saigon. The present issue seems to center on the desire of Commander in Chief General Minh to impose military discipline on four subordinate naval officers who forced the relief of their commander; meanwhile Premier Quat wants to postpone disciplinary action, presumably out of fear that it might increase tension among Buddhists and Catholics.

2. Meanwhile, Air Vice Marshal Ky, who may be influencing Quat's views, appears to favor no disciplinary action on the grounds that there is no serious threat from junior officers. Ky presents the whole episode leading to the removal of Admiral Cang as part of a continuing purge of "bad elements" in the military leadership, and as unrelated to current religious problems. Ky said one or two more officers might be purged, but that the process was nearing completion and the military situation would soon stabilize.

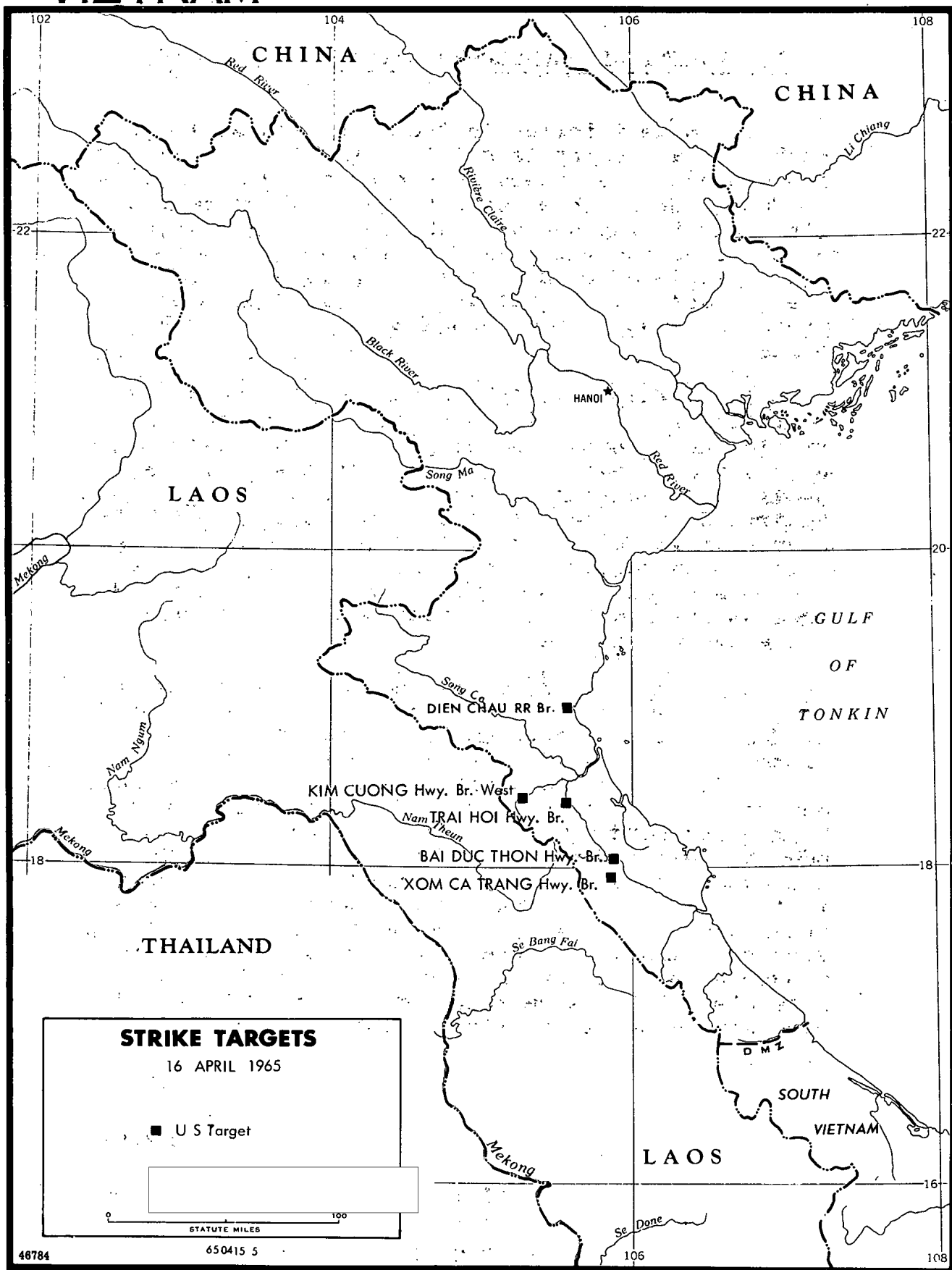
3. Vice Premier Tran Van Tuyen, stopping in Paris before embarking on a good-will mission to Africa, stated at a press conference that South Vietnam would consider favorably participation in any conference on Cambodia. He answered questions, however, on the possibility of negotiations over Vietnam by stating that dialogue with Hanoi was possible but not with the Liberation Front. On the question of relations with France, Tuyen said that there were no longer any fundamental differences between the French and US positions following President Johnson's speech and implied that an improvement in French-Vietnamese relations might be feasible. Tuyen's remarks appear off the cuff, and may not necessarily reflect Saigon thinking.

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NORTH VIETNAM



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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. All five bridges attacked by US Air Force and Navy aircraft on 16 April were either destroyed or rendered unusable. Air force jet fighter bombers struck the Dien Chau railway bridge on the Hanoi-Vinh railroad and dropped one span in the water. The Kim Cuong highway bridge on Route 8 near the Laos border was also destroyed by the air force. This is the second bridge in the Kim Cuong area destroyed during the past week. In addition, the air force successfully dropped one span of the Trai Hoi highway bridge on Route 15 and destroyed the south end of the bridge.

2. US Navy carrier-based strike aircraft destroyed two bridges in the Xom Ca Trang area along Route 12 and also dropped the south end of the south span of the Bai Duc Thon bridge on Route 15. Another rail bridge a short distance from Bai Duc Thon was struck, with unknown results. Aircraft from all strikes returned safely.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai, North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, Laotian Communist leader Prince Souphannouvong, and the special envoy of the National Liberation Front, Prof. Nguyen Van Hieu, have all arrived in Djakarta to attend the 10th anniversary celebrations of the Bandung Conference. In a written statement distributed at the airport, Chou En-lai called upon the Afro-Asian nations to "smash all imperialist schemes for aggression and war," at a time when the "imperialists" are engaged in "frenzied aggression" and "war adventures," especially in Vietnam, Indochina, and Southeast Asia.

2. Press reports indicate that Laotian Communist leader Souphannouvong was also present at the two-day conference in Kunming between Vietnamese and Chinese leaders, having accompanied DRV Premier Pham Van Dong on the flight from Hanoi. All three country delegations departed together on the 16th for the Bandung anniversary celebrations. At the public functions in Kunming keynote speeches expressed the solidarity of the Vietnamese, the Chinese, and the Laotians in the face of US aggression.

3. The Liberation Front representative at the Bandung celebrations is a prominent Front spokesman who has been recently active in Peiping, Prague, and at the Phnom Penh Indochinese People's Conference. He arrived in Djakarta on the 15th, a day ahead of the other Asian Communists. His arrival speech dwelt on the necessity of US troop withdrawal from South Vietnam, the line he will probably push at the conference.

4. A Chinese editorial in People's Daily on 16 April enlarges upon the international importance of the Vietnam conflict--a theme emphasized by regime spokesman Liao Cheng-chih in a 14 April speech. According to People's Daily the struggle in Vietnam

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is "an important part of the world-wide struggle against US imperialism," which "contributes enormously" to the "national liberation movements" in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and to the entire world revolutionary movement. In an appeal "to take action" in response to the North Vietnamese National Assembly request for support, the editorial calls on the people of the world to launch a "powerful mass movement" to force the US out of Vietnam.

5. This line probably foreshadows a major Chinese effort to exploit the Bandung anniversary ceremonies in Djakarta to garner Afro-Asian support for the Peiping position on Vietnam. China's initial objective is probably to obtain political backing, but the Chinese may entertain some hopes of expanding this to include "volunteers" at some future date.

6. Chinese propaganda continues to assert Peiping's unyielding position concerning a Vietnam settlement. The People's Daily editorial hammers at the necessity for withdrawal of all US armed forces from South Vietnam as "an indispensable precondition" for the peaceful solution to the Vietnam question. The Chinese warn that "the issue of peace and war" on the Vietnam question hinges on whether the US will get out of Vietnam.

7. Although it once again endorsed North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong's "four-point stand" as the only way to restore peace, the editorial did not mention any possibility for negotiations. Instead, People's Daily reiterates declarations of confidence that the "Vietnamese people will fight on unrelentingly until ultimate victory" if the US refuses to withdraw.

8. Peiping is, however, seeking to avoid giving an impression of complete intransigence. Chou En-lai has told the ambassador of a nonaligned country resident in Peiping that China is preparing a reply to the 17-nation Belgrade appeal--not to please Tito but to keep a promise made to Algerian President Ben Bella.

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9. Peiping has previously indicated its opposition to the nonaligned nations' appeal privately, and the Chinese decision to prepare a formal reply is almost certainly due to the desire to avoid antagonizing its signatories unnecessarily. The Chinese response will probably assert to the insincerity of the US position in approving negotiations without conditions.

10. Chou reportedly told the ambassador that Chinese press attacks against U Thant were due to the UN Secretary General's "improper" interpretation of the Chinese message on Vietnam sent to him through the Algerian representative to the UN. Chou charged that U Thant tried to use the message to restore the UN's prestige and to help the US. The bad faith of U Thant and President Johnson, the ambassador reports Chou saying, is the reason for the positions set forth in the past few days by Ho Chi Minh and the National Liberation Front, positions which China can only support.

11. Excerpts from the speech by DRV vice minister of national defense, Tran Qui Hai, before the National Assembly session in Hanoi last week are the first remarks we have seen which spell out in detail the "urgent tasks" which Hanoi says are now facing its army and people in the light of the US air strikes. According to the Chinese Communist broadcast version of Hai's speech, these tasks involve striving more "energetically" for a better air and coastal defense, improving public security, integrating economic requirements with defense needs, improving ideological work, and fostering further "determination to fight US imperialism." The people's "readiness to fight" and to work "wherever required" is to be increased and the populace is to be prepared for "any type of war" and "any hardship." The speech is another indication that the regime is concentrating its efforts now on organizing all aspects of domestic life in the DRV to meet the challenge posed by the military attacks on North Vietnam.

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12. There is no confirmation of the recent French press report quoting a "reliable source" in Peiping to the effect that North Vietnamese party first secretary Le Duan has gone to Moscow for a visit in a semiofficial capacity. According to the report, Le Duan left Peiping for Moscow after a visit to the Chinese capital on 10 and 11 April. We have no hard information on Le Duan's whereabouts during the past week. Hanoi radio said that he was a member of the presidium during the National Assembly session in Hanoi from 8 to 10 April. It is not clear from the broadcast, however, whether he was in actual attendance during the session.

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